



Esther - Chapter Eight

II Esther 3:1-9:17 - Main Action (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

With the death of Haman, the royal signet ring and the position of influence that Haman had previously held was passed on to Mordecai. However, Haman's death did not resolve the issue of the impending genocide of the Jews for the king's edict could not be revoked by law. When Esther pleaded with her husband to save her people he gave her authority to write a new edict and this was done giving permission to the Jews to defend themselves if anyone tried to enforce the Hamanian edict. This new command gave rise to great rejoicing among the Jews and many other people professed to be Jews but only out of fear for what may happen to them when the Jews rise up to defend themselves.

II.g Esther 8:1-17 - Esther Saves the Jews

In this section Esther solves the apparently unsolvable problem: how can something unchangeable, i.e. the king's edict, be changed?

¹ On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. ² Then the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. So Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Esther 8:1-2

On that day. The king acted swiftly to replace Haman with Mordecai thus ensuring a smooth transition of power and administration.

King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman. The property of condemned criminals was forfeited to the crown. Haman, the disturbed man who had seemingly achieved everything, ended with nothing - nothing even to pass on to his family.

Esther had told what he (Mordecai) was to her. Previously Esther had revealed only that she was a Jew. Now she informs her husband the king that Mordecai is her cousin and therefore he is related to the king through their marriage.

The king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Haman had to work very hard to achieve everything he had. Yet it was all for nothing; it was all a waste. He should have lived his life after the conclusion of Solomon, who carefully considered these things: <<*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil*>> (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Refer to the comment made on Esther 3:10 regarding the significance of the king's signet ring.

³ Then Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet, weeping and pleading with him to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ The king held out the golden sceptre to Esther, ⁵ and Esther rose and stood before the king. She said, 'If it pleases the king, and if I have won his favour, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I have his approval, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote giving orders to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. ⁶ For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming on my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?' ⁷ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to the Jew Mordecai, 'See, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he plotted to lay hands on the Jews. ⁸ You may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring; for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked.'

Esther 8:3-8

Then Esther spoke again to the king. Haman was dead, but the edict of destruction he had issued with the king's authority was still in force, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be

revoked: <<Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked>> (Daniel 6:8). Given this state of affairs, the only way a decree could be countered was by issuing another one that made it difficult or impossible to implement the first.

You may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring. The king could not revoke the previous decree, so he simply gave Esther and Mordecai the authority to make a further decree giving support to the Jews against their attackers.

Haman could be thought as in the place of the enemy of all God's people, Satan, and joyfully await the day God puts him away. However, they still must deal with the righteous decree of God that demands the death of all sinners: <<the person who sins that shall die>> (Ezekiel 18:4b), and: <<For the wages of sin is death>> (Romans 6:23a). In their sins, Christians not only have an enemy Satan, but they also have a legal decree from a righteous God against them. God solves the problem, not by compromising his decree for eternal justice, but by fulfilling justice in taking the punishment all humanity deserves - his counter-decree saves them: <<it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus>> (Romans 3:26). Christians can only be thankful for the grace of God that brought Paul to also write: <<but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord>> (Romans 6:23b), and: <<There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus>> (Romans 8:1).

⁹ The king's secretaries were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language.

¹⁰ He wrote letters in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed them with the king's ring, and sent them by mounted couriers riding on fast steeds bred from the royal herd. ¹¹ By these letters the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, with their children and women, and to plunder their goods ¹² on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. ¹³ A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in

every province and published to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take revenge on their enemies.¹⁴ So the couriers, mounted on their swift royal steeds, hurried out, urged by the king's command. The decree was issued in the citadel of Susa.

Esther 8:9-14

Sivan is the third month of the Jewish religious calendar, in late spring around May-June. There was still nine months left to deal with this issue before the previous edict came into force. However, time was still of the essence given the large geographic reach of the empire and only means of communication available - hand written letters.

The king's secretaries were summoned at that time. The orders were written immediately to be sent out to all the leading people and the Jews throughout the entire empire from India to Ethiopia. They were written in every language and dialect that was used by the various people groups in the empire so that there could be no misunderstanding of this new edict.

The Jews received their own copies in their script and their language, presumably Hebrew, so that they would know what was written. Otherwise, unscrupulous leaders who perhaps opposed the Jews may have kept the new order hidden from them.

Because the Jews had been so widely dispersed by the Assyrians initially and many generations had grown up in foreign lands it seems likely that many of them would no longer have spoke or read Hebrew. There would no doubt have been priests and scribes among them who could. If not, they would hear it in the local language that they did know and use.

Any armed force. The Jews are only permitted to defend themselves by destroying armed enemies who attacked them. It is possible, but not certain, that the wording of Esther 9:5 is broader, indicating that they also attacked known enemies who would have done them harm but who simply refrained from attacking them on that day.

With their children and women. Any children and women who participated in the attack upon the Jews were also legitimate targets who could be killed.

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. This was a date determined by lot at the time of the original edict; refer to Esther 3:13 and the associated comments.

The Jews were to be ready on that day to take revenge on their enemies. It was legitimate for all Jews to defend themselves by killing anyone who tried to attack them under Haman's original decree.

So the couriers, mounted on their swift royal steeds, hurried out, urged by the king's command. There was an urgency to get the word out about this important decree of the king. Christians should show a similar urgency when it comes to being heralds of the decree that the justice of God has been satisfied for all humanity in Jesus Christ.

The decree was issued in the citadel of Susa. This meant that it had the authority of the king as it was drawn up in his palace and would have had the mark of his seal upon it.

¹⁵ Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, wearing royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple, while the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶ For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honour. ¹⁷ In every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict came, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a festival and a holiday. Furthermore, many of the peoples of the country professed to be Jews, because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

Esther 8:15-17

Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, wearing royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple. God's purpose in all these matters goes further than the sparing of the Jews from destruction; he also purposed to raise up Mordecai as the prime minister - as a replacement for Haman.

The city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. This is further evidence that Haman's attitude to the Jews was not typical, as also seen in Esther 3:15 when they were all shocked to hear the fate of the Jews under the first order.

For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honour probably because people saw that the king himself now favoured them. This joy came before the actual day appointed when the Jews would be attacked, yet now authorised to defend themselves. Nevertheless, because of the decree of the king, they can be assured of victory and rejoice in it ahead of time, just as Christians can be in whatever era they live and whatever trials they may face, as the apostle Paul confirms: *<<I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ>>* (Philippians 1:6).

There was gladness and joy among the Jews. They rightly saw that they were already as good as saved because their enemies would now be afraid to attack them.

It is interesting to reflect on the confidence that both the Jews and their supporters had that they would now survive. They were not the dominant force in the region and they had no army of their own. Without mentioning that they were God's people, it is clear that everyone knew God would now defend them and give them the victory they needed.

Many of the peoples of the country professed to be Jews. Many people tried to pass themselves off as Jews because they did not want to become the targets of the Jews when others attacked the Jews under the original edict. This was because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them. They would rather be protected by the Jews than face them. They also knew of the power now wielded by Mordecai: <<All the officials of the provinces, the satraps and the governors, and the royal officials were supporting the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. For Mordecai was powerful in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful>> (Esther 9:3-4). Another interpretation of this text is that as they saw God working on behalf of his people, they wanted the same relationship with God. The church now needs to show that to the world today.

The attitude of the opponents to the Jews is much the same as the Canaanite nations when the Israelites first crossed over the River Jordan, as reflected in the words of Rahab in Jericho: <<For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard it, our hearts failed, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below>> (Joshua 2:10-11).